

VZCZCXRO1591
OO RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHGA RUEHGD RUEHHA RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL
RUEHQU RUEHRD RUEHRG RUEHRS RUEHTM RUEHVC
DE RUEHCV #0338 0711447
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 111447Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0778
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

id: 145258
date: 3/11/2008 14:47
refid: 08CARACAS338
origin: Embassy Caracas
classification: SECRET
destination: 08CARACAS328
header:

VZCZCXRO1591
OO RUEHAO RUEHCD RUEHGA RUEHGD RUEHHA RUEHHO RUEHMC RUEHNG RUEHNL
RUEHQU RUEHRD RUEHRG RUEHRS RUEHTM RUEHVC
DE RUEHCV #0338 0711447
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 111447Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0778
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

----- header ends -----

S E C R E T CARACAS 000338

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2018
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CO](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ STRIKES CONCILIATORY TONE, RESTORES
RELATIONS WITH COLOMBIA

REF: CARACAS 000328

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DAN LAWTON,
REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez abruptly changed roles from Field Marshal to Peacemaker after returning from the Rio Summit in Santo Domingo. During his March 8 International Day of the Woman speech, Chavez struck a conciliatory tone toward Colombia by reopening diplomatic missions, recalling troops from the border, and reiterating his call for the release of Franco-Colombian hostage Ingrid Betancourt. Chavez's most recent constructive rhetoric, however, belies his implicit admission that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) operates in Venezuela or the reality that the bulk of Venezuelan forces never made it out of garrison after being ordered to the border. END SUMMARY.

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

12. (SBU) On the occasion of the International Day of the Woman March 9, Chavez announced the immediate restoration of diplomatic relations with Bogota and invited the recently expelled Colombian Embassy personnel to return to Caracas. The Foreign Ministry released the same day a communique celebrating "the victory of peace and sovereignty" in Santo Domingo and the immediate return of Venezuela diplomatic personnel to Colombia. The dispatch also urged expelled

Colombian diplomats to return "as soon as possible."

13. (SBU) Venezuelan media reported that the Venezuelan legation would be headed by Commercial AttachQ Gregorio Flores and staffed by 11 other diplomats. Sources at the Foreign Ministry told the press that Venezuelan Ambassador Pavel Rondon, who had been recalled in November following Colombia's decision to remove Chavez from his role as humanitarian exchange facilitator, would not be returning to Bogota and a female candidate was being sought to replace him. Those same Foreign Ministry sources expressed hope that Colombian Ambassador to Venezuela Marin Valencia would not return to Caracas. However, March 11 press reports that Marin plans to return to Caracas that same day.

HOME FOR HOLY WEEK

14. (S) Chavez also announced during the March 9 speech that the ten battalions he had ordered to Venezuela's border with Colombia would withdraw on March 11. Chavez thanked the defense forces for their service to the fatherland and announced that all soldiers sent to the border would receive a special leave during Holy Week (starting March 15). Open and sensitive source estimates indicate that only about a third of the estimated manpower and equipment had completed the approximately 260-mile journey to the border area since the order had been given seven days earlier.

WHY NOT CALL

15. (SBU) During the same address, Chavez stood next to Yolanda Pulecio, the mother of Ingrid Betancourt, and publicly appealed to the FARC chief for Ingrid Betancourt's release. "Manuel Marulanda, send us Ingrid," Chavez said. Adding fuel to the rumor that Betancourt's release via Ecuador had been imminent until the March 1 cross-border raid, Chavez added, "When you can, when conditions make it possible, liberate Ingrid Betancourt. It doesn't make sense to keep her in the jungles of Colombia."

16. (C) Comment: Chavez's decision to send troops to the Colombian border never appeared to resonate politically except among the Venezuelan president's most ardent supporters. In addition, Chavez's warning to Colombia not to repeat what it did in Ecuador, and his ostensible rush to prevent any Colombian cross-border military operations against the FARC in Venezuela were implicit admissions that the FARC is operating inside of Venezuela. Moreover, Chavez's mobilization order appeared to confirm that Venezuela's armed forces are not exactly mission capable. Nevertheless, Chavez is once again exhibiting his tremendous political agility by seizing the opportunity the Rio Summit provided to transform from a Field Marshal into an advocate of peace and fraternity.

DUDDY

=====CABLE ENDS=====